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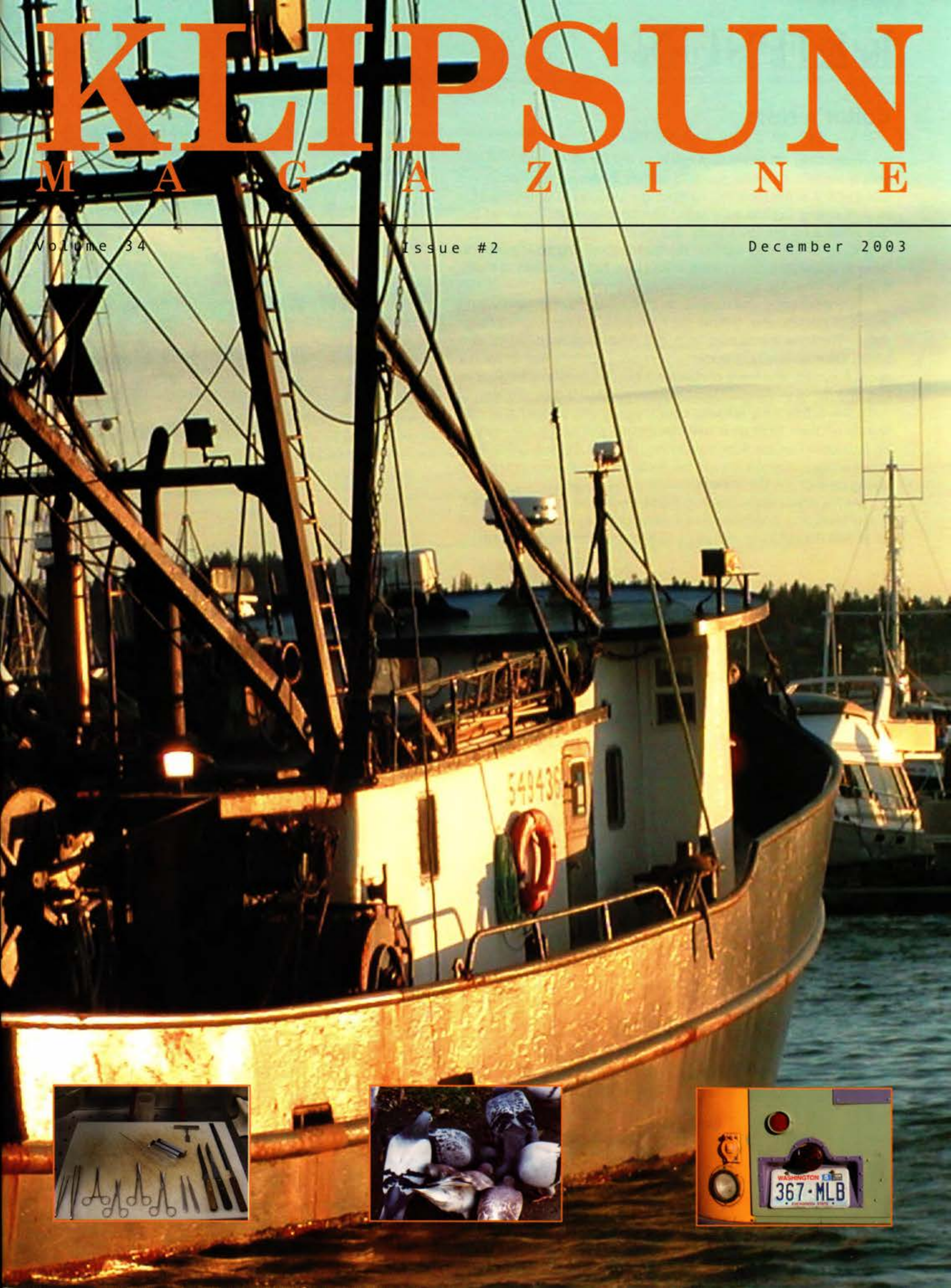
KLIPSUN

M A G A Z I N E

Volume 34

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KLIPSUN

Editor's Note

Producing an issue of Klipsun is not an easy task. Playing phone tag with sources, revising stories 20 times, working in the office until 2 in the morning, balancing a load of upper-level classes and eating Doritos as a substitute for two major meals of the day takes a toll on one's body and mind.

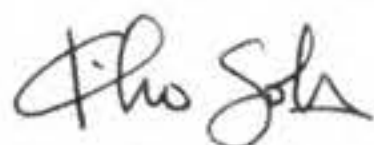
Only the strong survive the production process, and you have to possess a deep passion and love for journalism to make it that far.

Consequently, each story in this issue has an underlying theme of passion that mirrors the hard work we put into our magazine. You'll be introduced to a guy who collects pigeons and treats them as family, a surfer who braves winter weather for his sport, brothers who have persevered through personal tragedy to become rising stars and many more who shared their stories.

I'd like to thank my editorial board, designers, adviser and staff writers for their hard work and dedication. Without them I would be face down on the floor screaming, and the Klipsun office floor is not a place anyone should be. Also, special thanks to Matt for taking care of me like always.

We hope you enjoy reading these stories as much as we did. If you have any questions, comments or story ideas please call us at 360.650.3737 or e-mail us at Klipsunwww@hotmail.com.

Thanks for reading,



Kiko Sola, Editor-In-Chief



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Photo by Josh Fejeran, courtesy of The Western Front

Cover photograph by Tara Nelson.



Dana Carr | is a 23-year-old liberal studies major with a minor in journalism. She would like to thank Gurjit Kaur and the rest of her family for welcoming her into their home and allowing her to share their story. She would also like to thank parents Fred and Julie Carr for helping to shape her concept of marriage by setting a good example.

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Erik Robinson | is a senior public relations major. He'd like to thank Dr. Gary Goldfogel for his time and contributions to the article. Erik hopes this article does not give anyone nightmares.

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Jeremy Edwards | would like to thank the manufacturers of the over-the-counter medicines that helped him concentrate on writing about David Parker and his pigeons and ignore the flu that racked his body and stole his sanity. He also would like to thank his interviewees for their utmost patience with his death-rattle of a voice.

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Matthew Hietala | is a journalism/anthropology double major graduating in March. He would like to thank his wife, Joleen, and his daughter, Gretchen, for being his girls. He would also like to thank the Olsons, Paul in particular, for sharing such an emotional story.

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Leslie Sugiura | is finishing up her fourth and final year as a public relations major at Western. She would like to thank all of the guys down at the docks for letting her snoop on their boats and telling her their fishing stories. She would especially like to thank her father, a commercial fisherman in Alaska, for being the inspiration behind her story.

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Brianne Cross | is a senior public relations major with a minor in French. She would like to thank the Harders for their cooperation and for allowing her to write this story during such a difficult time. She wishes them the best of luck.



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Shauna Bakkensen | is a senior public relations major. She hopes people can adopt Carrie Wigren's positive outlook on life and learn that dreams are sometimes replaced with even better realities.



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Jordan Lindstrom | is a senior journalism major interested in pursuing a career in public relations with a major sports franchise. When not consumed full time by school and work, Jordan enjoys fishing the Samish River in his home town of Burlington.



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Katie Grimes | is a senior public relations major who hopes that one day her career will take her around the world. She would like to thank Chateau Westport and their friendly staff for the fabulous weekend accommodations, her sources for their time and patience and Mr. McDonald for the key to the inner circle.



a Marriage of Two cultures

Dana Carr tells the story of an Indian-American family striving to define its own concept of the arranged marriage. Photos by **Tara Nelson**.

Sisters Mandeep and Gurjit Kaur Atwal catch up on the events of the last week with one another over piles of rice and beans at a Mexican restaurant. Bubbly and beaming, Mandeep tells her little sister all about a stylish, scantily clad girl in one of her classes and a drunken goofball who hit on her in the library. As only sisters can, they chat about boys, classes and Gurjit's new purse.

As members of a Sikh family from India's Punjab region, 20-year-old Gurjit, her older sister Mandeep, 22, her two younger sisters, Sandeep, 13, and Rajdeep, 10, and her younger brother Rajparthive Singh, 5, will all have arranged marriages.

But having lived for more than a decade in an America that teems with proud individualism and the cult of choice, the Atwal family has formulated its own concept of arranged marriage. It's a concept that strives to preserve the best of their Indian heritage while integrating elements from the American culture they have embraced and enjoyed.

Gurjit was born in Germany, but lived the first nine years of her life in a small Punjabi village. She is the second child of an arranged marriage between her father, Bhupinder, and her mother, Rachhpal. The couple met a week before their wedding day and have been married for 24 years. In an expressive stream of Punjabi, translated by Gurjit, and a little bit of earnest English, Rachhpal recalls the beginnings of her marriage to Bhupinder.

"I met my husband. He was happy, healthy, good boy, no problems, huh? Good life," she says with an air of fond contentment.

When Rachhpal's parents chose Bhupinder to be her husband, he was living in Germany and they had only seen a picture of one another. On her way to Germany, alone, she says she was scared and nervous, but happy. During the week leading up to

their wedding, they went out to a park under the supervision of Bhupinder's cousins.

"My husband looked very, very cute; very, very handsome," Rachhpal says. "I am not so much."

So she asked him, 'Do you like me? Do you want to marry me?' He said yes and asked her the same, to which she also replied yes.

After the wedding, they honeymooned for a month, traveling around Germany. She says they got to know each other better during this time and they became a part of one another. It was hard to get used to his family and she missed her own, but she made up her mind to accept them as her new family and make it work.

Upon hearing all of this, Rachhpal's two oldest daughters shriek and hoot.

"Can you believe my mom never told us this stuff?" laughs Mandeep.

Although this scenario resulted in a lasting, stable married life, Gurjit is glad her parents believe she should only marry someone she has met and approved of based on her own face-to-face impressions.

"I don't date," Gurjit says with a shrug. "I'll have an arranged marriage, but my parents are open-minded. If I told my dad that I was interested in some guy, then he would have to be the same religion and path as

me. My parents will take a look at him and see if they like him, and if not, then it's not going to work out."

She has the option of looking for her future husband herself or letting her parents do it for her. Either way, both sets of families and both prospective marriage partners must agree to the union. Gurjit says she feels as though it is her parents' responsibility to find men they approve of, and then she can choose from there.

"I don't want to get into any problems where I start liking somebody and then my parents reject him," she says. "If they



think someone is interesting for me, then they will let us have a conversation, talk to each other and get to know each other, and then my parents and I discuss whether we like that guy or not."

To avoid ambiguous emotional entanglements, the couple must decide whether they want to marry after this first meeting. First impressions are everything.

There are roughly 20 million Sikhs in the world and an estimated half million in the United States. Jatinder Singh of Bellingham's Guru Nanak Parkash Sikh Temple estimates there are no more than 50 Sikh families in Whatcom County.

With such limited local options, the Atwal family makes use of Indian periodicals - published in the United States and structured much like personal ads - to locate potential husbands for their daughters.

Traditionally, an Indian girl doesn't move away from her family until she is married, and then she moves in with her husband and his family. Gurjit's parents have decided that the pursuit of education is worth breaking this tradition, so Mandeep is living temporarily in Seattle to study. Gurjit continues to live at home, attending Bellingham Technical College and working at Bellis Fair Mall.

While her parents look for a husband for Mandeep because she is the oldest, Gurjit continues to formulate her own criteria for her future husband. She says he must be Sikh, with an education and family background similar to her own. Although Gurjit doesn't rule out the possibility of two people from different backgrounds with different religions making a good match, she doesn't think it's very practical or likely in the context of her own life.

"I think it's best when the two religions are the same, and then you get married," Gurjit says. "Some people do work it out, which is great; you know one of them says, 'I'll leave my religion for yours,' but they have to pick one and I pick mine."

Sikh literally means "disciple" in Hindi. Sikhism is a monotheistic religion founded about 500 years ago by the spiritual teacher Guru Nanak. Marked by the rejection of idolatry and caste, Sikhs are clearly distinguished from India's Hindu majority.

Many Sikhs, like the Atwal family, have left India to escape the threats of religious violence and poverty to search for civil security and economic opportunity. Violence between Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and other religious groups has plagued India's history for centuries. An understanding of the instability involved in being a Sikh in India is central for Gurjit as she describes her family-focused philosophy of life.

"Something that means a lot to my parents means a lot to me, too, because they went through a lot of trouble to bring us here, to raise us in the land of opportunity," she says. "And if I stand on my own two feet, I start to forget what their dreams are and what they want from us. Here they say, 'It's my life, I can do whatever I want,' and I can say that too. But I look at it as like

maybe I owe them because they're my parents and they gave me this life."

Gurjit says she tries to cooperate with her parents to live her life in a way that satisfies her and pleases them as well. She doesn't ask to do things that she already knows her dad doesn't approve of.

"He wouldn't try to stop us, he would just say, 'You know what's right and wrong,'" Gurjit says.

To act in defiance of her parents' influence and advice would be a risky undertaking. As an Indian woman, Gurjit says the effect her behavior has on the rest of her family is huge. A woman's behavior reflects more strongly and directly on the family than a man's.

Using a common Sikh figure of speech only used in reference to girls, Gurjit elaborates on the double standard with an attitude that is equal parts resentment and acceptance.

"If a girl does something wrong then they would say, 'You have ruined your dad's white turban,' which is a big thing," she says.

Ultimately she describes this reality of her identity as a chance to live up to moral standards that she can be proud of.

"God gave me the strength to be a girl," she says. "He thought that I could handle being an Indian Sikh girl who can be responsible for my dad's turban and my mom's scarf."

Although Gurjit seems to have accepted her role as an Indian Sikh woman, she emphatically states her preference for boys. She says that when she has kids someday, she hopes they are boys because they are easier to deal with and making sense of life as an Indian-American will not be so difficult for them.

"I don't want my poor little girl to go through what I'm going through; the pressures, responsibilities, the culture differences," she explains solemnly.

"If I do have a daughter, I won't be so strict. If I live in this country and if my future husband decided that he wanted to be strict and follow his culture, then I would say, 'Let's go live in India.'"

The intertwined issues of marriage and gender roles continue to be the hottest topics of discussion in the Atwal household. With the big-screen TV burbling a 'Little Mermaid' cartoon in the background and little Raj bouncing around the kitchen linoleum on his scooter, Rachpal and her two eldest daughters engage in animated debate over the pros and cons of arranged marriages. Jovial digs counter heated assertions and it seems as though everyone is comfortable expressing their thoughts and feelings.

Gurjit says she has decided to look at the issue of having an arranged marriage as a challenge to rise to rather than a problem to be intimidated by.

"It's kind of like jumping into a well without looking to see how deep it is," she says. ♣





Knife

In an ordinary building nestled in downtown Bellingham, Whatcom County's doctor of the dead quietly goes about his everyday business of autopsies and investigations. **Erik Robinson** dispels some common misconceptions of a morgue. Photos by **Tara Nelson**.

After Death

Growing up in American society, one where the average citizen watches seven hours of television a day, most people are conditioned regarding what to expect when entering a morgue. Horror movies like "Tales From the Crypt" and "Seven" depict people walking down eerily lit hallways, shoes lightly squeaking on the plain linoleum floors. They walk through a heavy door that merely reads "Morgue" and enter a dark, gaping room, reminiscent of some kind of black abyss, with just a few bright lights illuminating a cold steel table in the center. On the table lies a body, and all around are countless more, anonymous men and women lying in their refrigerated tombs. The doctor, a socially inept, slightly crazy man, leans over the body, about to make the first incision.

The reality, it turns out, is nothing like what we have all grown up to believe.

Following a casually dressed middle-aged woman to the morgue, it becomes obvious there will not be any dark, eerily lit hallways on the way. In their place are a few flights of stairs and a couple of doors marked "Private." The morgue is not an endless line of meat locker tombs with a single table in the middle, but rather a brightly lit, well-ventilated area with four refrigerators. Red biohazard bags with contents unknown lay everywhere, and thus far, neither Dr. Gary Goldfogel, a shorter, well-groomed man with glasses, nor his assistant, Rocky Champagne, seem at all crazy.

Goldfogel, the Whatcom County Medical Examiner, is about to perform an autopsy on a man who died the day before. He bustles into the morgue in operating scrubs, dons a light blue shower cap and a white mask and grabs his tape recorder.

"Listen, if you feel queasy or feel like you need some air, just step outside, okay?" Goldfogel warns. "You are here to listen and learn, but we do not want to have to take care of you."

"What I am going to do now is open up the chest, and Rocky is going to cut open the top of the head to peel the face back and remove the skull cap and brain," Goldfogel instructs.

A few days before the autopsy, Goldfogel sits in his cluttered office. He leans back in his chair, kicks his feet up on his desk and starts talking about his job. A

large microscope sits on his desk amidst the sea of papers and books. Lying next to it is a blood pressure gauge. The only decorations adorning the sterile walls are a few subtle bird paintings and a mass of framed degrees.

The amount of school actually required to obtain all the degrees necessary to become a forensic pathologist turns away many medical students, Goldfogel said. He grew up in Denver and began walking the medicinal road at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, where he studied biology and chemistry.

He then attended Emory University in Atlanta, followed by an internship and residency at the University of Washington. He holds three medical board certifications – one in surgical pathology, another in laboratory medicine and a third in forensic pathology. He might actually be considered overtrained for what he does. Of the approximately 350 forensic pathologists in the United States, Goldfogel says less than half hold all three certifications.

"Growing up, say around high school, if you had asked me what I wanted to do I would have said I wanted to be an eye doctor," Goldfogel says as he takes off his glasses to rub his own eyes. "But when I got the opportunity to work with some eye doctors, I was terribly disappointed. All they were concerned with was the procedures of eye care, and I was much more interested in why people got things. Pathologists are the natural historians of disease – we don't fix anything."

Champagne says many people have an inaccurate idea of the duties of forensic pathologists, imagining they offer a one-stop shop for all death investigation needs. This misconception is largely due to the hit television show "C.S.I." The protagonists of the show miraculously unravel the mysteries and secrets of death at crime scenes, and although much of this does come with the job, the real thing is less glamorous.

"The expectation of people after seeing

these shows is that we can do all these magical things," Champagne says. "In reality, the techniques used on those shows are spread out across many different labs and many different doctors."

Buuuzzzzzzzzzzzz..... The bone saw begins to cut through the top of the man's skull as Goldfogel pulls out a pair of hedge clippers.

"This is the sophisticated medical tool we use for opening up ribcages," Goldfogel says as he lifts up the soon-to-be-bloody gardening tool.

The crunching and cutting of bone, muscle and sinew is a sound that is foreign to most people, but Goldfogel had to get used to it quickly. When he applied for his job 15 years ago, he thought it was merely an opening for a pathologist in Bellingham. When he got here, he soon discovered from his predecessor that he would require another five years of school to obtain a specialty degree in forensics, and much of his job would entail complex investigations of fatal incidents.

The actual jurisdiction of a medical examiner, according to the Whatcom County Medical Examiner policy and procedure reports, begins at death. He or she is authorized to perform autopsies and determine the cause of death of any violent, unnatural, unexpected or suspicious deaths. After such a death occurs, emergency personnel place Goldfogel in charge of the body, and he ultimately decides whether an autopsy will be performed.

Dissecting a body to learn what happened to it has been a common practice since Greek physicians performed autopsies 2,500 years ago, but it was not until 1769 that the first comprehensive pathology text, "The Seats and Causes of Diseases Investigated by Anatomy" by

Italian physician Giovanni Morgagni, was written. Despite being an ancient practice meant to teach, Goldfogel said many people have a serious problem with autopsies.

Although families have no say in whether an autopsy will be performed, Goldfogel says he does try and accommodate certain wishes, such as religious beliefs. For example, Orthodox Jews and Muslims require burials before the next sundown and this may require that Goldfogel perform the autopsy at night or on a weekend to meet a family's wishes. In rare cases, he may do an external examination instead of a full forensic autopsy if the family has strong objections and he can get all of the information he needs without doing an internal autopsy.

Although all of this does not sound glamorous and can be emotionally, mentally and physically grueling, Goldfogel says he loves the excitement and opportunities his job affords.

"Every case I see holds a new mystery to be uncovered," Goldfogel says.

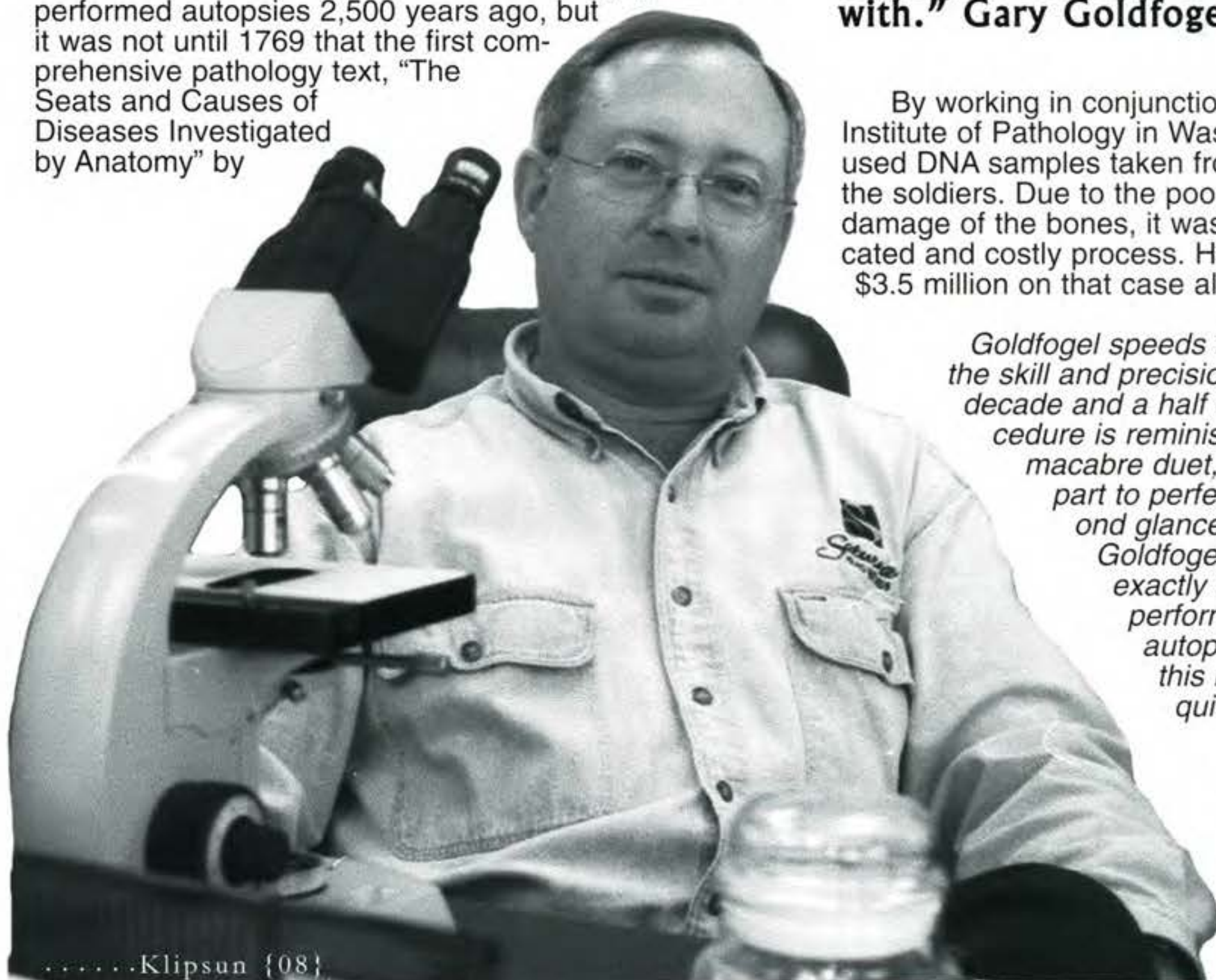
One such mystery occurred last year when a World War II plane was found encased in a glacier on Mount Baker. It was thought to have been lost at sea. Charred bone fragments of the plane's crew of eight soldiers were discovered inside. Investigators immediately took the bones to Goldfogel, who was charged with discovering the identities of the men who were supposedly lost forever.

"... My next patient is likely alive right now, and that is a very strange feeling to come to work in the morning with." Gary Goldfogel

By working in conjunction with the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Washington D.C., Goldfogel used DNA samples taken from the bones to identify the soldiers. Due to the poor condition and burn damage of the bones, it was an extremely complicated and costly process. He says the AFIP spent \$3.5 million on that case alone.

Goldfogel speeds through the autopsy with the skill and precision that come from a decade and a half of experience. The procedure is reminiscent of some sort of macabre duet, each man playing his part to perfection. With hardly a second glance at any of the organs, Goldfogel says he now knows exactly what killed the man. He performs approximately 150 autopsies a year, and he sees this man's cause of death quite often.

Although he has been working with the dead for a long time, Goldfogel says it can still be difficult. Seeing a young





woman who was molested and beaten to death, or a child who burned to death in a fire is still incredibly emotional and tragic.

Champagne says detaching himself from emotion by maintaining a high degree of professionalism makes it easier, and Goldfogel says humor is also key. He describes his favorite Gary Larson "Far Side" cartoon hanging in the morgue in which a goofy-looking morgue attendant finds a winning lottery ticket in the cadavers body and says, "Lucky stiff."

"Naturally I try to detach myself from what I do, but the day I stop feeling anything is the day I know it is time to look for a new line of work," Goldfogel says.

He also keeps himself busy with many other activities. He teaches ethical issues in health care at Western, as well as a course on death and dying at Fairhaven College. He educates Bellingham police and paramedics on what to look for on bodies and at crime scenes. Goldfogel says one of his favorite things to do is to testify in court because it is a unique teaching opportunity in that he has the opportunity to teach an audience, (the jury,) about something without ever directly speaking to them.

Whatcom County Prosecutor Dave McEachran says he has to call on the medical examiner to testify in many different types of deaths ranging from poisonings to vehicular homicides.

Goldfogel's job duties do not stop with court appearances, crime scene investigations and autopsies. His varied days also require quite a bit of work on live people. Doctors at St. Joseph Hospital use Goldfogel to investigate the cause of injuries on many patients, and he also investigates all sexual assault cases that occur in Whatcom County.

"That's right," Goldfogel jokes. "You don't have to die to meet me."

Getting occasional whiffs of the autopsy odor, it is easy to imagine how unbearable it would be if the morgue did not have a complete air change every 40 seconds. Once the body is open, human beings are just like all other dead things— we smell really bad. As soon as the man's chest is open and the ribcage has been removed, Goldfogel begins to remove and weigh organs.

"You see here how the heart has all this fatty tissue around it and is grossly enlarged?" Goldfogel's muffled voice asks from behind his mask as he holds up the organ. "That is not very good for you."

Once the organs are out and have been studied, weighed and recorded, Goldfogel tosses them into one of the mysterious red biohazard bags. He ties the bag up, turns and says he is done. Champagne does some clean up, puts the biohazard bag into the chest cavity, and sews the man up. Goldfogel dictates into his tape recorder that the man died from a heart attack due to a history of bad health coupled with clogged arteries and an enlarged heart.

For most, seeing an autopsy is probably a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The amazing creation that is the human body was laid down in its most vulnerable state, stripped, cut, studied and put back together. The entire process, from Goldfogel entering to the man being sewn took approximately 40 minutes. Now, the man will be sent to a funeral home where the family will lay him to rest in whatever way they choose. Goldfogel's role is now over, but he knows more will come.

"Medicine has become more complicated today, and there is much more violence in the world... the need for forensic pathologists is going to keep growing," Goldfogel says. "But it is a job not many would want. My next patient is likely alive right now, and that is a very strange feeling to come to work in the morning with." ❖

What's *He Looking* At?

As a boy, David Parker loved pigeons enough to steal some from an old woman. **Jeremy Edwards** explores Parker's menagerie of pigeons that eat like pigs, race like horses and fly like little fighter jets. Photos by **Tara Nelson**, photo illustration by **Justin McCaughan**.

David Parker is close to 6 feet tall, but his brawny build makes him seem taller, almost intimidating. The 22-year-old Western freshman has the build of a farmer or a lumberjack. As he walks to his back yard, small structures appear to branch out from the house and shed. Each holds dozens of cooing, flapping birds — pigeons.

He reaches into one of the coops and grabs a pigeon. Like a turtle, it sucks its neck in, causing its head to disappear. Its feathers strangely resemble fur as they puff in all directions through his fingers. It doesn't squirm; it knows he's in control. He could crush it with one squeeze.

But he won't.

He wouldn't dream of harming even one feather.

"I know each one of them individually, like, I would know if that one didn't come home," he says, pointing to an ordinary-looking pigeon. "And I have an intimate knowledge of who has mated with who, who had which babies. This is almost like they're my kids, in a sense,

because I keep such good track of them."

Parker breeds pigeons outside his High Street house, which isn't a difficult task, since they reproduce like rabbits. He had 20 birds last year. He now has nearly 80. He has racing pigeons, albinos and some just for show.

But Parker recently noticed his pigeons were disappearing.

"Birds would disappear in the night, and I had no idea where they were going. I didn't know what was going on, except that the doors were always closed. I figured someone must've been taking them."

After losing eight birds, he was determined to solve the mystery, so he kept watch one night from his basement.

"I was getting angry and jittery sitting in there with the cat, just watching. When (a bum) came down the alley, I was like, 'Oh, what the hell?' ... I came out of the house in my sweatpants and sandals and followed him down the alley, and he started to pluck one of them he hadn't even killed yet. He (had been) barbecuing them."

Parker yelled at the bum and threatened him, which scared him away.

"He just tossed the birds up in the air and went away," Parker says. "I haven't seen him since."

Bellingham Police Lt. Craig Ambrose says the bum could be charged with trespass and burglary. "The bottom line is — yeah, that's illegal. If it happens again, (Parker) should call the police."

Parker just shakes his head.

"Yeah, they're really nice plump birds, and I'm sure they taste like chicken, but I wouldn't eat one."

He's standing there with the pigeon in his fist, but he's just holding the bird to show off its ankle tag. He opens his hand, and the bird flutters into its coop, leaving a greenish smear on his hand and scattering some feathers to the bottom, a graveyard of fluff, feathers and droppings. Parker wipes his hands on his blue jeans, which look new, but coarse and rugged, at the same time.

Birds of a feather get stolen together

Parker grew up on a Wyoming farm and had an unusual way of getting interested in pigeons.

"I stole six birds from my first girlfriend's grandma when I was very young," he says. "She had racing (pigeons). I put my own bands on them and put my name on them. Then I let them go three weeks later, and they flew back to her house with my name on them. I got in trouble, but ..."

He smiles. "After the initial theft ... I said, 'I want to get started, would you give me some birds?' And she did. Then they turned into 10, and that turned into 15, and that turned into 20."

At age 15, he had to get rid of them when his family moved into a no-pets-allowed apartment in Port Orchard. Two years ago, he finally was able to start accumulating pigeons again. Now he's a member of the North Cascades Invitational Racing Pigeons Club, which meets on Bow Hill for pigeon races.

Think of them as little, flying horses

The sight of birds in flight stirs something in Parker.

"I love watching birds fly," he says. "It's almost something mystical in nature."

Bellingham resident Ray Coward, the club's vice president, has been a member for five years. When Coward had 250 racing pigeons, he supplied them with a special feed

*"I love watching birds fly. It's almost something mystical in nature."
~ David Parker*



that cost him nearly \$100 per week.

"It's part of training them," he says. "I mean, a race horse isn't going to eat grass off a lawn."

His pigeons' training includes conditioning for long-distance races.

"First, we'll race a 30-day-old from Everett to my house — that's a distance of about 70 miles," he says.

Within a year or two of racing, the pigeons will work their way up to the long race: Weed, Calif., to Bellingham — 550 exhausting miles. The pigeons, which often travel at an average speed of 50 mph, can make the trip in a day. No one knows for sure how the pigeons find their way home, but some think they can sense magnetic north, Coward says.

Pigeon racing did not exist in the United States until the 1870s, after Americans imported homing pigeons from Europe.

American Racing Pigeon Union Inc., which has nearly 700 affiliated clubs around the country and establishes the rules of pigeon racing in the United States, has no limit on the number of pigeons their owners may race simultaneously. Each bird has an electronic band on its leg that its owner scans into a computer. The computer calculates the swiftness of the pigeon's journey and determines the winner.

Coward, whose pigeons have won at least 30 races in the last two years, cautions that people should not race their pigeons much farther than 600 miles because fewer birds return as the race gets longer.

Many times, predators are to blame for the pigeons' failure to return.

"I have a lot every year that come home ripped up from a hawk or falcon," Coward says. "You're losing one or two a day, sometimes."

Parker knows the pain of losing a pigeon to predators.

"I named one last year: Blueberry. She was a really pretty white-with-blue-splash bird, and I named her and had her for about two months, and she got eaten by hawk."

His voice cracks.

"Every time you have a bird cool enough to name, it inevitably gets eaten by a hawk. I don't name anything anymore."

Now, like many other pigeon owners, he numbers his birds before racing them.

"All of the racers in the cage are winners," he says, nodding to the cage he first grabbed a pigeon from. "Some of them are four- or five-time winners. Just like there are families in dog shows, there are families in bird racing, and all of (them) are from really good families."

But Parker isn't a high roller in the world of pigeon racing. Although he once won \$500 in a pigeon race, he mostly races for fun, not money.

The international nonprofit organization People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals is adamantly opposed to pigeon racing, says Amy Rhodes, Senior Animals in Entertainment Specialist for the group.

"Oftentimes, these animals are shipped in the mail from breeders to buyers in horrible conditions," Rhodes says. "We regularly receive whistleblower complaints from (United States Postal Service) employees who report to us that birds have suffered and died in shipment from stress, from extremely high or low temperatures or from being overcrowded."

Parker says he has received 20 birds through the postal service's air mail and never has had a problem, nor has he heard of other pigeon owners who had any problems.

"You pay a hefty price for sending birds through the mail," he says. "Anything from five to 10 birds is \$70-plus for shipping and handling. That's the same way pet stores get their birds."

Dirty birdies

In addition to the money a person can make from racing pigeons, Parker points out some of their advantages over other birds.

"Pigeons lend themselves to captivity well," he says. "They come home (and) don't fly away. Chickens are noisy, and they're not friendly to handle. Any other bird you couldn't let free-fly. (Pigeons) don't create that really nasty smell that you would get from farm animals or chickens, and that cooing noise is the loudest noise they make."

Parker doesn't understand, then, why many people think pigeons are disease-ridden.

"They take a bath every time they get a chance," he says. "If I put a dish of water in there right now, they would jump immediately into it and begin splashing around."

But pigeons, like any other birds, contract diseases. Mosquitoes and other insects frequently sicken and kill pigeons. In fact, some scientists tracked the westward spread of the West Nile Virus by monitoring bird fatalities.

Parker keeps a bug zapper running night and day to keep the bugs away from the coops.

"Last winter was so warm that the flies got bad around the cages," he says. "Pigeons have the same bugs all wild birds can get. Avian lice is a big one. (But) it's not anything people can catch."

Many dislike pigeons because of the "flying rat" reputation they have on the street. That was the first thing that came to mind for Western sophomore Sean O'Connor, one of Parker's neighbors, when he found out he was living next to bunch of pigeons.

"I just thought they were rabid, you know, like in New York City," he said.

Dr. John Berry of Lynden Veterinary Hospital, who has treated birds for 12 years and cared for Parker's pigeons, says people incorrectly associate pigeons with filth because when they see them, they think of inner cities.

"Pigeons are scavengers," he says, "but the biggest scavenger is the bald eagle, and it's our national bird."

To reduce the spread of diseases, U.S. Customs imposes long waits on pigeons coming into the United States, many times isolating the birds for up to 30 days in order to determine that they are healthy. This often has delayed Parker from getting some of his exotic birds.

Parker has pigeons that look like they flew out of a Dr. Seuss book. The swallow, which usually is bred in Germany, has large, flipper-like plumes on its feet. Some of his other pigeons, which came from India, Ukraine and England, have unusual feet or fan tails. Although eBay-like Web sites such as eggbid.com provide one way for people to acquire these exotic breeds, Parker typically networks through people he knows.

"The first guy I found selling fancy pigeons was in the nickel ads," he says. "You meet someone who has them, and then he knows someone else, and he knows someone else. You wouldn't know unless you got into the circle."

Parker asserts that most of these fancy pigeons wouldn't survive in the wild.

"They're not too good at flying," he says. "All of these adaptations are bred in captivity. They're basically show birds. They're not adapted to watching for predators."

You can't spell 'pigeon' without 'pig'

"They're hungry," Parker says. "If I go over there with that big thing of food right now," he gestures to a coffee can, "they'll tackle me. They'll just be all over me, trying to get the food."

The pigeons are hungry because Parker keeps them that way. He doesn't starve them; he just keeps them hungry enough to return to the coop.

"Food is the ultimate training tool," he says. "Pigeons are pigs: They love to eat."

They certainly eat like pigs. As soon as Parker shakes the feed into a trough, they begin shoving one another aside. A pigeon walks across the backs of two others, straining its neck toward the trough until it falls in. A small pigeon snaps at a larger one that has bumped it out of reach.

Parker's pigeon feed, which feeds 50 birds and lasts a month, isn't the fancy brand Coward feeds his racers; Parker's costs only \$20 and consists of barley, millet, popcorn, peas, wheat, rice and other grains.

But the pigeons fighting at the trough don't seem to care.

"Anything they eat goes in one side and comes out the other in 30 minutes," Parker says.

In fact, after his pigeons "dappled" a neighbor's pickup truck, Parker set specific feeding times for them.

"I know it happened to one of our roommates, and he apologized," said Western sophomore Stefanie Warmouth, one of Parker's neighbors. "We've never had a problem with them."

'Little fighter jets'

Parker claps his hands, and the pigeons blast out of the coop, gray fluff flying everywhere, and alight in the maple trees overhead. For a moment, everything is still.

Suddenly, one of the birds breaks from the leafy canopy, rustling the brightly colored October leaves and causing rain to drip onto Parker.

"He must see a predator," Parker mutters, walking to the front yard to get a better view.

As if he has given a command, the pigeons take to the air, cluster together and begin circling the house. Then they start flying in formation.

"They're like little fighter jets," he marvels. "They stick pretty close together. If they were to scatter and fly different directions, a hawk would

fly right into the group, and they wouldn't even notice."

Parker says he's sometimes embarrassed to stand in his front yard and stare at his birds because he's sure passersby wonder what he's doing.

"I look semi-retarded as I gape up at the sky," he says. "(People) don't know what I'm looking at. They'll look and see the birds and wonder, 'Wow, what's his problem?'"

But whatever self-consciousness Parker feels passes quickly as he gazes at his pigeons winging their way around his house. To the birds, he's a gentle giant, the one who feeds them, shelters them and protects them from bugs, hawks and hungry bums. Despite what he says, he doesn't look semi-retarded.

He looks like a proud father. ♫



From the Farm to the FIELD ▶

Brothers Andy and Lann Olson are respected on and off Western's football field. **Matt Hietala** profiles the brother's lives, family and friendship. Photo (below) by **Josh Fejeran** courtesy of the Western Front and (right) contributed by the Olson family.

Two huge charter buses pull off Interstate 5 near Chehalis in Lewis County, and head east. About a mile down the road the buses turn into a small farmhouse surrounded by acres of cows.

As the buses come to a stop, young men begin slowly trickling out one by one, stretching, yawning and jabbering with each other. These men aren't here to work, though, they're here to feast, celebrate and prepare.

At last, Lann and Andy Olson emerge, home again at their family's dairy farm.

When Lann, 23, comes forward, it's obvious he is a linebacker. At 6 feet tall, his 215 pounds bulge throughout his body. His neck is thick and his arms are thicker. Massive veins run down his biceps, giving opponents an idea of how much work he has put in lifting weights, readying his body for the football field.

The sixth-year senior Western football player is a star on his way out, having just completed his final season of college ball.

Andy, 21, is a thoroughbred. He is tall, lean and angular, and at first glance, it's obvious that he's an athlete. He stands 6 feet, 3 inches tall and weighs 210 pounds. He is big, fast and physical. His balance and grace are evident in the way he steps off the bus.

Like his brother, Andy is a football player. He is a sophomore wide receiver who came into his own on the Viking football team this fall.

The Olsons, along with the rest of the Western football team, are taking buses from Bellingham, stopping by the family farm on their way to an early season matchup.

From a family supportive enough to allow 50 testosterone-filled college football players fill their front yard before a game, the Olson brothers have emerged as Western's top football players, on and off the field.

"They come from a great atmosphere growing up and a strong family," said Western head football coach Rob Smith.

With more than 300 acres and a couple hundred dairy cows among other animals, the brothers had plenty of work to keep them busy on the family's dairy farm.

Parents Paul and Dalene raised the Olson clan on a steady diet of hard work and reward. Lann, Andy, older brother Kyle, older sister Karen and younger sister Laura all got dirty working on the farm.

"All five kids have worked real hard on the farm," Paul said proudly. "Between the three boys, they've bucked well over 100,000 bales of hay by hand."

Their parents would make sure the kids got the jobs done and then let them goof off with water fights and front yard campouts.

"We tried to have a good balance and teach that hard work pays off," Paul said. "I tried not to be a slave driver, but you'll have to ask them about that one."

Lann, who graduates this quarter with a degree in psychology, said the work helped in generating his strong work ethic.

"It helped me when I was in physically demanding situations later on," he said. "I knew that I could get through it okay because I'd worked hard before a bunch of times. Hard work was nothing new."

Grueling work kept the Olsons together and the farm up and running, even through tragedy.

Just over five years ago, 19-year-old Kyle, then the family's oldest boy, died of a self-inflicted, accidental gunshot wound.

"I think Lann put it best. He said it was instant devastation," Paul said.

Kyle, distinctively Lann and Andy's role model, left a void within the family.

"He was everyone's hero," Paul said. "He was trained to be a leader. We expected happiness from him. We always expected big things. Even his older sister looked up to him."

The accident happened 10 days before Lann was to leave for Bellingham for his first season of football at Western.

"I've always regretted sending him up there so soon," Paul said. "I don't think he had the time to heal that he needed."

Lann said at the time he felt that he needed a change.

"It might have been better to stay, but I wanted to get out of town and out of that situation," he said. "It was something that I wanted to do. I needed to shift my focus away from that."

Though the tragedy rattled the family's homogeneity, Lann and Andy grew closer and developed a stronger friendship since coming to Western.

"Because Lann was so much older than Andy in high school, they played on different teams and didn't get the chance to interact on the field and therefore didn't do much together off of it," Paul said. "It's neat to see the kind of relationship they've created."

Andy said being teammates at Western has changed their rapport.

"I wouldn't say me and Lann were real close growing up," Andy said hesitantly. "We didn't really get the chance to be. Since we've gotten the chance to be teammates the last few years though, it's become more of a friendship and less of an older brother-younger brother relationship."

Though they all come from the same gene pool, Lann, Andy and the rest of the Olson kids couldn't be more different.

"My wife and I have looked at each other a thousand times and asked, 'How did we get kids with so many different personalities,'" Paul said.

Kyle and Lann's personalities were similar in part because they were almost the same age. Paul said Lann



was the kid who hung with the tougher crowd, while Andy was in the more popular, preppy group. Needless to say, they didn't share the same friends in high school.

A trace of their former high school cliques is in their appearance today. Lann wears his head shaved to stubble and has an intimidating, biker-style bushy red goatee. Andy, on the other hand, wears his hair short, neat and clean-shaven.

Paul said no matter how different all of his kids were growing up, he has been proud of all of them.

"All of the kids were a lot of fun," Paul said happily. "Though it's been hard dealing with Kyle's tragedy, my wife and I couldn't have asked for more as parents."

Although the family hasn't fully recovered Kyle's death, they have learned to deal with their grief. For Lann and Andy, their brother is still with them in everything they do.

"I looked up to him in everything I did," Lann said. "He taught me how to approach football and how to approach life and I still carry that with me today."

The Olson cheering section likes to think of themselves as an inspiring bunch on Saturdays during football season at Civic Stadium.

The group, which sometimes grows to as many as 15 to 20 people, occupies a substantial chunk of the bleachers just under the press box.

"We're pretty loud and pretty vocal," Paul said. "We drag whoever we can get up to those games. Friends, relatives, in-laws, aunts, uncles, cousins, whoever. We have a lot of fun cheering for the boys."

Lann is a co-captain and leads the team with three sacks and is second on the team with 53 tackles. Last season he was an all-region pick and this year is a lock to repeat.

With the urging of his high school coach Igor Hoglund, a Western alumnus, Lann chose the Vikings as his colle-

said. "It's amazing what he does."

After amassing exceptional statistics at Centralia's W.F. West High School, Andy had plenty of colleges courting him, but following a tear in his knee late in his senior all-state season, many of the schools backed off of their recruiting.

"They thought he was damaged goods," Paul said.

Andy leads the Vikings with 44 catches for a total of 865 yards and eight touchdowns, and ranks second nationally in yards per game. He has also been named Great Northwest Athletic Conference player of the week twice this season.

Though he

could have possi-

bly had an opportunity to shine at a bigger school if not for injury, Andy's been happy with his Western experience.

"I have no regrets," he said. "I had a chance to go somewhere else, but (because Lann went to Western) I was familiar with the campus up here and I liked the what the coaches had to say. I've been really happy here. I've met some great people. I think this is the place to be."

Though the Olsons play different positions on the field, Lann and Andy display some of the same characteristics that make solid football players: direction, competitiveness and drive.

"They are the unquestioned leaders of this team on both sides of the ball," Smith said quickly and matter-of-factly, as if he's said it a thousand times. "They are the heart and soul of this team."

Lann, the quieter of the two, is more likely to bottle up his emotions and move on. He's a lead by example guy, not big on cheerleading.

"Lann is a very quiet, reserved person," Smith said. "He doesn't speak a lot. He just goes out and gets the job done."

Andy is a bit more vocal and

more prone to express his emotions, like in a game against Saint Mary's on Sept. 27.

On a crucial third-and-long play, Andy caught an improbable bobbled ball to convert the first down. Caught up in the moment and fired up from his clutch grab, Andy spiked the ball into the ground and was flagged with a 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.

"Andy's a tough kid," Lann said. "He's not afraid of anyone or any situation. With his natural talent, he is a very confident player."

Though neither boastful nor cocky, Andy is more likely to go up and talk to a coach during a game and offer his opinion about what plays will or will not work. Lann, on the other hand, is likely to just keep working.

"He's so big for this team," Andy

said. "He never puts anyone

down. He's always encouraging, always motivating. He puts everyone in a better state of mind no matter the situation the team's in."

The Vikings are back at the Chehalis farm, relaxing and preparing for the next day's game in Oregon.

A few players sit in chairs, finishing off Dalene's homemade dessert. Others stand, tipping back fresh dairy milk.

Off to the side, Paul is smiling, thinking about how to get some free work done in the coming summer. Though his boys are the backbone of Western's football team, they are still Olson farm boys who are experienced at bucking bales of hay.

"I don't think I can get Lann down here for a summer," Paul said with a chuckle. "He's 23 now and kind of has his own thing going. But I'm really hoping I can trick Andy into coming to spend the summer here again. There's a lot of work that we can get done." ❖



giate team. He liked the campus and the coaches, and the university was eager to accept him, offering him a scholarship.

"I still remember watching Lann's (high school) tape," Smith said. "Just the way he could run and hit. We call it the RH factor, and his was way up there. We haven't been disappointed."

After red shirting his first season and receiving a medical redshirt after he ruptured his spleen early in his second year, Lann has become synonymous with Western defense in his six years with the Vikings.

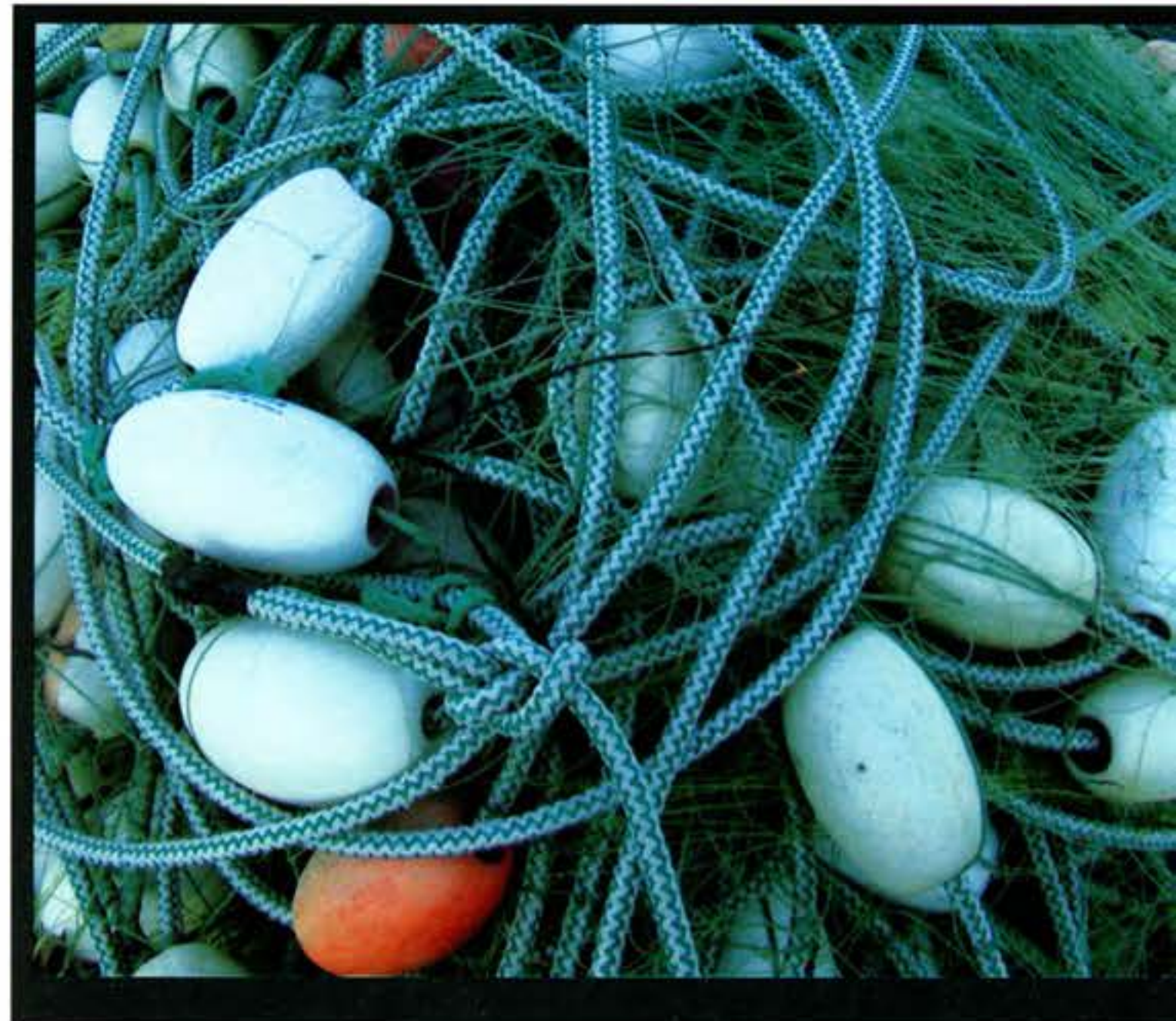
"Lann's been with us for so long that his teammates have a lot of respect for him," Smith said. "He knows what he's doing and teammates look up to that."

Included in that bunch is junior safety Rob White, who has patrolled the field with Lann the last two seasons.

"He's one of the hardest workers in the weight room and when it comes to the running and conditioning," White

empty*nets*: *an industry in peril*

An occupation that has created much of Bellingham's history has nearly been forgotten. **Leslie Sugiura** casts a line into the lives of those who left the commercial industry and those who live with the daily struggles of being a fisher. Photos by **Tara Nelson** and **Leslie Sugiura**.



The 20-minute drive from Brian Haling's Ferndale residence always starts with a triple shot vanilla latte. His day starts at 7 a.m. when the commercial gillnetting season for king salmon is open, although fishing will not open until 7 p.m. that evening.

Before he leaves each morning, Haling spends time with his girlfriend and their three children making breakfast and playing games. Haling values his time spent with them because when fishing is at its peak, he can put in over 24 hours of hard, manual labor before he gets any time off.

When the fish are there, Haling spends most of the night working his way up and down the net, removing the fish by hand in order to keep the seals from eating his earnings. As the sun begins to rise, Haling pulls in his nets and motors back into the harbor. If he is lucky, he will get some sleep before starting again the next day.

Fishers estimate that compared to 20 years ago, fewer than half the fishing vessels remain. Many boats in the harbor have "for sale" signs posted high in their windows.

"Every boat was a commercial boat at this gate (20 years ago)," Haling said as he pointed to the boats surrounding his own. "The boats, along with the people, are all going away."

Bellingham fishers struggle to hold on to the only job they know, yet it is slowly slipping out of their control.

Will the tradition last?

Fishing was once the focal point of Bellingham, said Pete Zuanich, who left the industry about 10 years ago. Zuanich, 57, has years of experience as a fisherman and a vast knowledge of the local industry.



In the early 1980s, The Bellingham Herald regularly announced fishing season openings and other important information pertaining to the industry. Twenty years later, stories about commercial fishing are virtually non-existent.

Dan Macdonald, 54, said Bellingham is not a fishing town like it used to be. He has spent a lot of time in communities such as Kodiak, Alaska and Astoria, Ore. and said the economies of those towns are more dependent on the fishing industry than Bellingham seems to be these days.

"I used to be invited into my oldest son's classroom to

speaking about fishing, but with my second son, that hasn't happened as much," Macdonald said. "There just isn't much interest. (Fishing) is not regarded as highly in the community as it used to be."

Many of the boats in the harbor were family-owned 20 years ago and boys in fishing families knew that eventually they would have boats of their own.

Fishing is a great tradition that once was deeply rooted in Bellingham. Now, most fathers would not encourage their sons to fish for a living, said Zuanich.

"My children have seen me in the business," said Macdonald as he fiddled with the navigational instruments in his boat the "Exceller." "I don't think they will want to make the sacrifices with their own kids that we have had to make as a family in terms of time spent apart."

It is difficult for a fisher to work and raise a family at the same time. Most are required to be away from their homes for months at a time to earn a reasonable income.

Rising costs

As tradition is pushed aside by lack of interest in the industry, many fishing vessels are now for sale in the harbor and their rusting frames reflect the lack of money in the industry.

Insurance can be expensive and fuel, gear, general maintenance and fishing licenses are also needed to keep the boats legal and in working condition. Fuel for a purse seiner, a popular type of fishing boat, can cost over \$500 per trip.



Many seining and gillnetting boats are rusting, rotting and badly in need of a fresh coat of paint. Beer cans and other discarded items float in the harbor and oil spots from leaky motors dot the surface. The web house is worn and crowded with piles of old crab pots and moldy, unused nets.

"Nevertheless, their boats are works of art; a living history," Squalicum Harbormaster Mike Endsley said. "It is fascinating to look over a commercial fleet, especially when it's busy and the fishermen are hard at work. You can't experience anything like that anywhere else."

75 cents

After being in the industry for 40 years, Zuanich left commercial fishing to start his own boat survey business, in which he inspects boats for banks and insurance companies. He got out of fishing before prices dropped significantly.

"Most Bellingham fishermen struggle now," Zuanich said. "They can barely make enough to support themselves with just fishing, and if they do, they are gone all of the time fishing multiple seasons. Even the best fisherman cannot make a living out there."

Twenty years ago, crew members could spend four to five months out of the year not working because of good prices and successful catches. Some students from local high schools and colleges became crew members to pay for schooling and teachers and firemen occasionally fished during time off to supplement their incomes.

In the 1980s, fishers received over \$2 per pound for salmon. In 1988, the price went up to \$4 per pound. Haling said fishers received just over \$1 for sockeye and 75 cents for kings during the 2003 fishing season.

"(The price) made me wonder if it was time to get out," Haling said. "It was scary, but I knew I was in it for the long haul."

With lowering prices, fishermen began to feel the pressure to produce fish, which was why Zuanich, and many others, got out of the business.

"If you had a couple of bad weeks, you could make it up (back then)," Zuanich said. "Now, you only have two days to make 90 percent of your income. The pressure just got to be too much."

Farm-raised fish and waning interest

A lower price per pound for wild salmon is a direct result of the introduction of farm-raised fish. Fishers have to compete directly with an industry that raises fish 365 days out of the year. The farms can raise any size fish the consumer wants, and deliver during the off-season months.

"I had to work a lot harder once farm-raised fish hit the market," Haling said. "I never believed in the quality of farmed fish, but people liked the price better, and it was available year round."

Fishers believe that the public is not aware that farmed fish are raised in pens and injected with dyes before reaching stores. Many consumers think buying wild salmon means the fish will become endangered. But, the fish caught are closely monitored by the state government and fish runs are shut down for fishing until more fish start to swim up the river to spawn.

"I plan on fishing another 20 years if my body lets me," Haling said. "I want those fish to come back as much as anyone else does."

Aside from lower prices, boat owners also began to have a difficult time finding experienced, hardworking

crewmembers. Owners began finding increased problems with drug and alcohol use among their crews and many were not as interested or as dedicated as they once had been.

"I remember being up in Alaska fishing and I looked at the stern and thought to myself 'I wouldn't have had this crew five years ago,'" Zuanich said. "I knew then that it was time to leave."

Splitting the catch

In 1974, U.S. District Court Judge George Boldt decided one of the most widely publicized and controversial court rulings on fishing rights. The decision allowed fishers from eight Native American tribes to take 50 percent of available fish in their "usual and accustomed fishing grounds." The 50 percent meant non-native fishers had to share the opportunity to catch fish with the natives equally.

"Fishermen began clamoring for anything they could get," Zuanich said. "It got ugly and it all went down hill from there."

The Native American fishers had a smaller fleet of fishing vessels, but had more opportunity to harvest fish. Their season started two to three days earlier than the open season, however, many came home before the other season in order to avoid conflict.

"During that time, they were our foes," Zuanich said. "It was very frustrating to have no control over the situation."

In recent years, the 50 percent harvest limit shared between Native American and non-native fishers changed to 32.5 percent, leaving even less fish to catch. Many Squalicum fishers are upset with how the government is

the following morning.

"It was our first year so of course we were going to have some glitches," Haling said. "The biggest problem was not informing the public of the days and hours we were available to sell fish. Hopefully, that will change next year."

Instead of selling their boats, some fishers have turned them into profitable businesses such as sport fishing vessels. Endsley said one fisher even took his purse seining boat and turned it into a kayak touring boat. The owner would take groups up to Alaska and teach classes on navigation and kayaking.

Predictions for the future

Fishers currently in the industry predict fishing will improve, but most agree it will probably never return to the way that it was 20 years ago. Some think the runs are starting to come back, but with the U.S. giving more fish shares back to Canada, access to those runs may not be possible. Public awareness about farm-raised fish will also be a key stepping-stone to getting wild salmon back into the market.

"People are starting to realize that farmed fish is not that good," Haling said. "I also think that fishermen will start marketing their own fish directly to the public."

For those still in the industry, the thought of leaving constantly lingers in the back of their minds but most are not ready to make that kind of change. To many fishers, finding a job to take the place of fishing is virtually unthinkable because it has become a part of them.

"The bottom line is that fishing is still fun and just as exciting as it always was," Macdonald said. "I still love to catch fish."



handling the runs. The trade-offs being made by the government make it difficult to continue fishing.

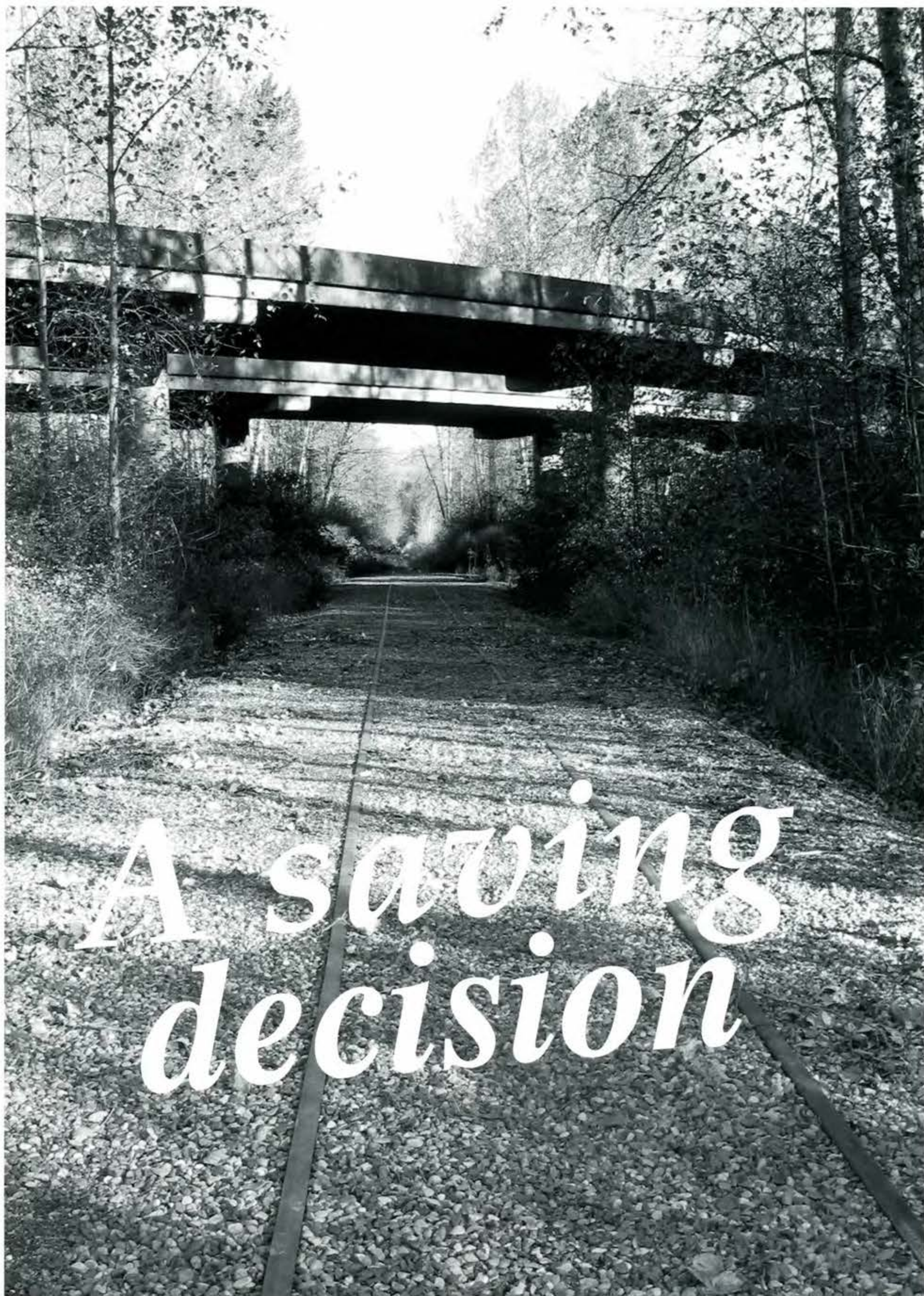
A hard day's work

Even with low prices and strict government regulations, fishers still find a way to stay in the business through creativity and diversification.

Endsley said this past summer was the first time fishers in the harbor sold fresh fish straight off the docks with help from a federal grant. Fishers would fish all night long, then sell their catches directly off their boats back at the harbor

Even with carpal tunnel syndrome in his wrists and bad knees from standing up in bad weather, Haling still goes out to fish. He said so much money can be on the line that injuries cannot stop a fisher; he or she needs to be completely dedicated no matter what.

"It's like no other job," Zuanich said. "It just gets into your blood. I wish I was still doing it, but I can't sit at Starbucks with a \$3 latte and still do it." ♣



A saving decision

The road to recovery for Shelley Harder is a slow and long journey. **Brie Cross** recounts an amazing story of a tragic accident on I-5 that almost took Harder's life. Photograph (left) by **Heidi Buhman** and courtesy of the Harder family and Porcia Jackson.

As 19-year-old Shelley Harder lay unconscious in a hospital bed, her eyes closed and her skin fair and pale, her parents Tim and Nancy Harder were trapped in a state of shock.

The doctors at St. Joseph Hospital in Bellingham said nothing more could be done for Shelley, and her condition over the next hour would determine whether or not she would continue on life support, surviving off the numerous tubes and IVs attached to her.

The Harders could do nothing but pray. Shelley had shown no sign of coherence or movement. Approximately 10 minutes later, the nurse who was with her told the Harders that Shelley had responded.

When Tim told his daughter he loved her, and asked her to squeeze his hand if she could hear him, Shelley lightly squeezed his hand. He then asked her to let go so Nancy could hold her hand. She did.

Her parents saw her for the first time after the accident more than eight hours after she arrived. But at 2 p.m. the doctors told them for a second time that they had done everything they could for her, and that she might not make it. Still, they knew she would be okay and a couple weeks later, Shelley woke up.

"I really think the Lord has interceded at least three times, when doctors had done everything that was humanly possible," Tim said.

On Aug. 19 at approximately 4:45 a.m., the driver of a green pick-up truck going northbound on Interstate 5 slammed on the brakes causing the truck to lose control and hit an orange construction barrel. The base of the barrel disconnected and was launched into the air, hitting Shelley in her abdomen.

Washington State Patrol officials believe the force of the airborne base, which was weighted with 35 pounds of sand, knocked Shelley over the 28-inch high railing and off the bridge. She then fell 37 feet to the railroad grates below.

After repeated unanswered calls to Shelley's two-way radio, her crewmates organized a search for her. Fifteen minutes after her fall, they found her radio on the pavement on the bridge, and her body on the ground below.

Tyson Scheenstra, a close friend of Shelley's who was also working as a flagger that morning, said after he found her radio, he looked around and saw her legs sticking out underneath the bridge. He then ran nearly a mile down from the

bridge to where she lay. When he arrived, she was conscious.

"She wanted to get up and move around," Scheenstra said. "She was literally in shock, and she had no clue what happened. As I was walking away, I turned and saw a little bit of blood coming out of her mouth, usually a sign of internal bleeding, and I got that it was going to be worse than I thought."

Shelley was taken to St. Joseph Hospital and treated for a broken pelvis, wrist, shoulder blade and third thoracic vertebra as well as several broken ribs. Her internal injuries included a lacerated liver, spleen and kidney and internal bleeding in her abdomen and brain stem, Nancy said.

During her first 12 hours at St. Joseph Hospital Shelley went through more than 25 units of blood. Thirty hours after she arrived and now stabilized, she was airlifted to Harborview

Medical Center in Seattle.

"We were told she was by far the sickest person at Harborview, which is a trauma center," Tim said.

shelley

Shelley has a doll's face – pouty pink lips, brilliant blue-green eyes, a glowing smile and fair

skin. Now, more than two months after the accident, most of her casts, braces and tubes have been removed, leaving only a collar brace now framing her freckled face.

She was a three-sport athlete who played volleyball, fast pitch and varsity basketball for Nooksack High School, as well as county and state teams. In her four years at Nooksack, Shelley earned 12 varsity letters.

She red-shirted for the women's basketball team last year at St. Martins College in Lacey where she attended her first year of college, meaning she practiced and played with the team, but did not travel with them. This year, however, she would have started her second year of college as a guard for the team.

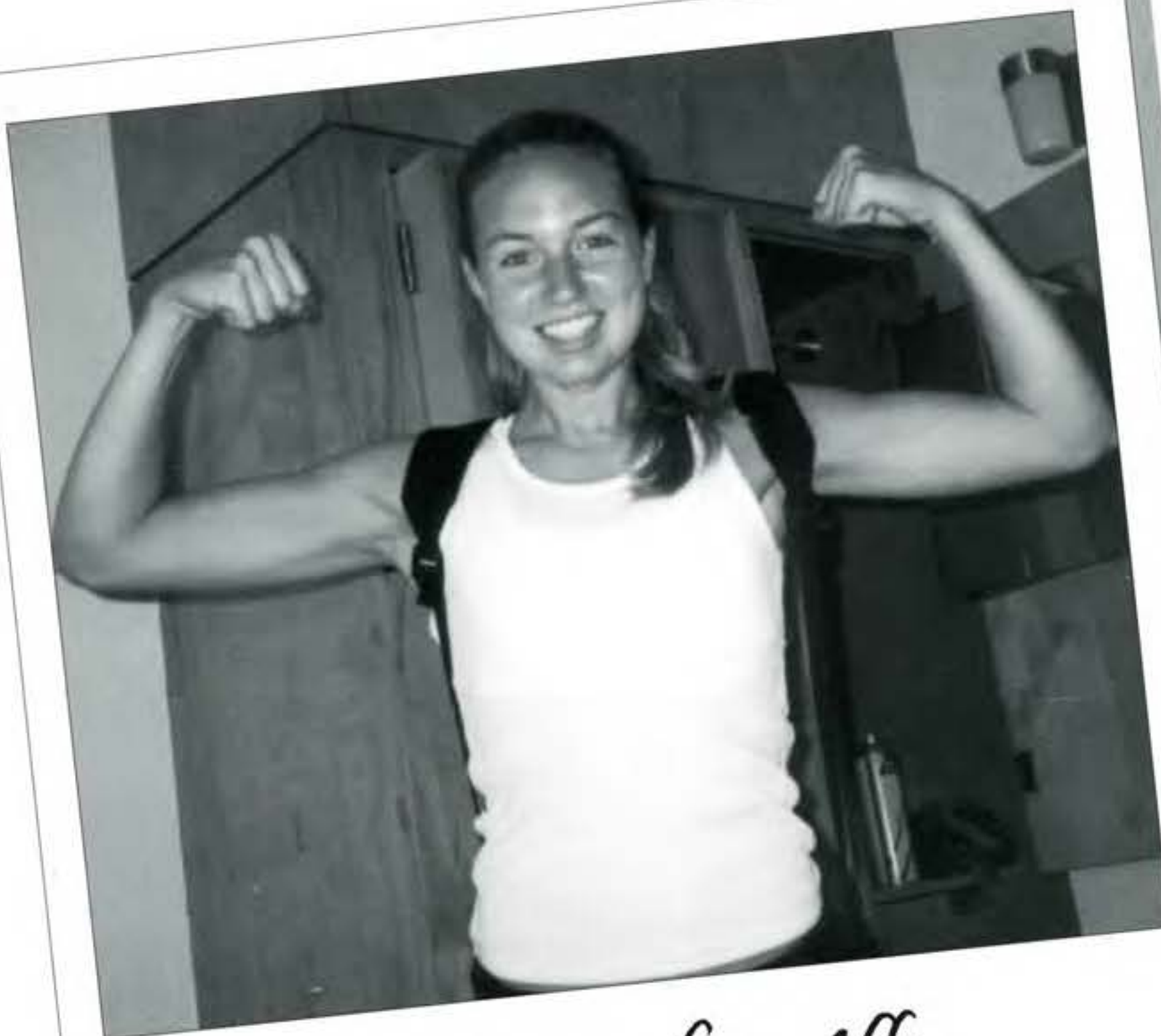
This will be the first year since the third grade that Shelley will not play basketball.

anywhere but here

It took approximately six weeks after the accident for Shelley to be able to communicate with her family by writing, shaking her head and mouthing words.

"The process she has made is not something they see normally. They tell her she is the miracle patient for the year."

—Tim Harder



Just goofing off

After more than seven weeks of not using her vocal cords, she was able to whisper. Her left vocal chord remains damaged but she whispers effortlessly.

"She doesn't like hearing that people are sad for her," said Stacy Pelleboer, a close friend of Shelley's. "She likes people praying for her, but she doesn't like people hoping, grieving or feeling sorry for her."

As three months of anxiety built up during her hospitalization, Shelley said her biggest motivator to recover was her desire to play basketball again, and to get her life back.

When the doctors in the physical therapy wing of Harborview Hospital told Shelley her predicted release date was in early December, she told them that was too long to wait. She wanted to be home for Thanksgiving.

Her physical therapy training ran six days a week, and was composed of five 45-minute sessions which worked her range of motion, strength and cognitive communication skills, such as her ability to speak and write.

To qualify for release from the hospital, Shelley had to be able to do a variety of every-day activities on her own such as getting up from a chair, sitting down, brushing her teeth and getting dressed.

"When I start to walk, the other stuff will be easy," Shelley said.

Now that Shelley is fully cognizant, the hardest thing for her will be staying in the hospital, she said.

Even with her rapid recovery, the shock of the accident

still hangs over her friends and family.

"Shelley is the last person you would think this would happen to," Pelleboer said. "She had everything going for her – she was playing basketball, going to college, (getting) great grades. She could have done pretty much anything she wanted to and she would have succeeded."

Although her recovery will undoubtedly continue for months, if not years, Shelley is progressing faster than expected.

"She has far outpaced (the doctor's) expectations. She has a long way to go as far as strength and conditioning, considering where she was as such as gifted athlete," Tim said.

Just as the Harders are impressed by the hospital staff's medical care, Shelley made an impact on many of the people who attended to her during her stay in the hospital. She was a common subject among doctors and nurses at Harborview as they discussed her progress.

"All the doctors say her athleticism has been one of the crucial things as far as her surviving the accident," Tim said. "The progress she has made is not something they see normally. They tell her she is the miracle patient for the year."

on the job

Shelley was working her second summer as a flagger for Wilder Construction Company and had spent a majority of the summer on the road construction on I-5 on the bridge near Squalicum Creek and the Sunset Drive exit.

The driver of the truck pulled over after it hit the barrel, but after the state inspector checked on him to ensure he was not injured, the driver was sent on his way.

"I am certain he didn't know anyone was injured," Tim said. "I wouldn't call it a hit-and-run. It may be the case that he is afraid to come forward, or that he was just passing through the area."

The identity of the driver remains unknown, but the case is still under investigation, Tim said.

Tim, a shop supervisor for the same construction company, said most U.S. states permit construction companies to temporarily lower the speed limit through a construction site. Washington is not one of them.

While it is possible to permanently change the speed limit on a highway, said Bill Duyungan, a construction traffic specialist with the Department of Transportation in Seattle. It is preferred to use alternative measures to get people to drive the speed limit, such as enforced speed patrol, however, the

department has been looking into alternative measures to increase safety through construction zones, Duyungan said.

Most drivers pay little attention to speed signs without the standard black and white coloring because they know even if they go over the limit they cannot be ticketed.

a league of support

Tim and Nancy split their time between their home in Everson and the hospital, sleeping on a chair next to Shelley's bed. Sunday through Thursday, Tim stayed at home, working and looking after their son Cory, while Nancy stayed with Shelley. Thursday they swapped, and Nancy came home. Photos of friends, basketball games, vacations at the beach and her girlfriends dressed up at dances adorned the wall across from her hospital bed.

Scrawled in black pen on the doctor's white board is a message from friends; "Shelley, we love you."

The amount of community support the family received is overwhelming, yet friends of the Harders said this is not in the least bit surprising.

"If you have been dealt with a tragedy and you do not know why, you feel like you are on an island," Tim said. "Knowing that you have that support makes you feel like you are on the mainland again. It fills in that void."

Officials at St. Martins, where Shelley attended her first year of college, organized a blood drive in Shelley's name, which brought in 109 donors – more than twice the record number of donations, Tim Harder said. The donations generated more than 300 units of blood.

Churches from all over Whatcom County sent prayer chains to Shelley. Friends and strangers alike sent letters and cards with money included, brought over casseroles and pizzas for dinner and mowed the Harders' lawn. Nancy's workplace, Compass, a medical billing company, organized a collection and bought pre-paid gas cards for the family.

The amount of support was greatest while Shelley was in the intensive care unit at Harborview. One night 48 people remained in the waiting rooms after visiting hours ended.

"Raising your kids, you should care about how they grow

up and how they will be in society as a positive role model," Tim said. "I look at this as a good barometer. She is only 19 and she has touched that many people."

when all is said and done

In describing Shelley, one of the first words her friends and family use is driven.

Melody Olson, the mother of one of Shelley's close friends, remembers one day her daughter's girlfriends were talking about boys, make-up and other standard pre-teen topics. All Shelley said was, "I can't wait to play varsity basketball."

"Ever since she was itty bitty she was outside playing hoops," Melody said.

Basketball was her passion, and her talent made her stand out among the team

"Shelley knows the game inside and out," said friend and teammate Porcia Jackson. "She is an awesome player, and an awesome teammate both on and off the court."

Though she constantly trained for basketball, she never had to work too hard to get good grades. Tim said she would be up studying when he left for work at 5:30 a.m., and would stay up late at night, too.

By the end of her freshman year at St. Martins, Shelley, a biology student, had a cumulative 3.84 GPA, earning her a spot on the dean's list.

While Shelley and her family are anxious to go home, they can see only so far into the future. Tim hopes Shelley can attend a class or two this spring and return to St. Martin's next fall. It could be another year until she is back on the basket-

ball court.

The Harders are taking it one day at a time, not looking ahead for answers but rather focusing on what they need to do at any given moment.

"You just do things, you don't really think of them as hard," Nancy said. "You don't think about it, you just do it." ❧



Shelley and
her B-Ball girls

Photo by Northwest Sports Photography



Asking for directions

Shauna Bakkensen visits with Carrie Wigren as she recounts her experience living with Consecrated members of the Roman Catholic Church. Photographs by **Tara Nelson** and courtesy of Wigren.

A slender young woman stands at the back of the chapel, hands clasped and head slightly bowed. Her chin-length bob sways down and then up as she responds to the priest's prayer. Her three-quarters sleeved sweater and stylish jeans starkly contrast the clothing she wore only a year ago. It seems a lifetime

has passed since 21-year-old Carrie Wigren began studying to become a nun.

Wigren is currently pursuing a degree in English with a minor in Spanish at Western Washington University. She is also the liturgical and communication peer minister for the Shalom Center, which means

she is in charge of preparing the center for Mass and other church-related events.

Before Sunday night Mass begins, Wigren's first task includes preparing the communion bread for the Eucharist. After mixing flour with Perrier water to help the bread rise slightly, Wigren places two flattened squares of dough onto the mottled baking sheet and into the oven. Twenty minutes pass, and the smell of fresh bread permeates the center's classic, Kennedy-era kitchen. Wigren grabs a pizza cutter and starts cutting a thin strip of bread.

"I feel kind of sacrilegious cutting the bread with the pizza cutter, since it is about to become the Eucharist, but I guess that's the point: 'humble beginnings,'" she says, referring to Jesus Christ's attitude of humbleness.

The genesis of the idea

Wigren says she wasn't interested in becoming a nun until her freshman year when she was a member of a bible study group at the Shalom Center. She said visiting speakers piqued her interest in a talk about the lay apostolic movement Regnum Christi and volunteer opportunities in the Coworker Program.

Wigren explains that several distinctions exist in vocational choices within the Roman Catholic Church. They fall within three main categories: consecrated, married and single. Priesthood, religious life, and consecrated lay life are defined under "consecrated," and these are the members who make vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to focus on Christ and imitate His way of life.

Training for an apostolic life

After two years of contemplation, Wigren decided to take action and contacted the Mater Ecclesiae formation center in Rhode Island. She arrived on a blustery day in January 2002 and saw for the first time the brick, colonial-style formation center where she would be living. The building had once been an orphanage, and as she made her way through the drafty hallways, she found her room filled with beds draped in simple maroon blankets. The walls were bare, and the windows near the beds let in pale winter sunlight.

Wigren was trained at the formation center on the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, the history of Regnum Christi and practical apostolic practices. She also took an etiquette class.

"We learned etiquette for a formal setting," Wigren says, smiling. "We ate everything with a fork and knife; fruit, sandwiches, everything. You don't know where you will end up, and you don't want to look like rude. When you're in a position of leadership people watch you no matter what you are doing."

When her training was complete, Wigren was told her destination for her year-long service. She only had

a day's notice before moving to a religious house in Washington, D.C. with four Consecrated women and five other young women.

Living with the Consecrated

Wigren's new home was similar to the formation center, with brick exterior, black shutters and two pillars positioned on either side of the main door. The house also included a chapel for Mass.

The young women shared rooms, as well as one computer in the office. Wigren and the five other roommates would awake at 5:45 every morning and attend Mass. Their detailed schedules included apostolic work in the community and continued until 10:30 at night.

"It was the hardest thing to get used to waking up at the crack of dawn," Wigren says. "Every minute was scheduled, prayer time, meal time; at first I thought, 'I can't do this.' At first it's like, who cares if I'm a minute late? But obedience extends to the schedule, not two minutes after."

The strict time schedule was one of the lessons she says helped her grow the most.

"It is great to have fun, but I learned how much time I wasted," Wigren says. "I try to do the best I can without a set schedule now."

After Mass, Wigren and her housemates would remain in silence until midmorning, following a strict schedule including housework, study, physical fitness, work in the community, prayers and apostolate. During lunch and dinner, the housemates would rotate serving the meals and reading from publications such as Zenit, a Vatican news service. Then everyone at dinner would join in on a discussion of the news followed by nightly prayers and silence.

Wigren says she learned to enjoy her set schedule, but she welcomed Sunday, the one day she was allowed to sleep in. Sunday morning Mass began at 8 a.m. and the young women were allowed to wear pants and spend time with one another and the Consecrated members.

"The Consecrated women were so much fun,"



Wigren says. "I was shocked. Even though this is what I wanted to be, I thought their personalities got sucked out when they were consecrated. But everyone played basketball and ultimate Frisbee."

Wigren and her housemates also adhered to a vow of poverty during their service in imitation of Christ's example.

"It wasn't like we walked around in rags," Wigren says. "We looked nice with our skirts and dress shirts, very businesslike, and our house was nice too. The whole idea is that you just don't use more than you need to fulfill the mission that Christ has given you."

She lifts her eyes, searching for snippets of her experience. A memory flickers across her face and she begins to smile.

"There were the running shoes too, you know – the "nun" type of outfit: skirt, nice shirt and the running shoes," she says laughing. "After awhile I kind of thought it was cute – almost."

Wigren says she felt shabby at times compared to the style-conscious East Coast residents, and because of her vow of poverty, everything was donated. Occasionally she and other house members would visit a grocery store, explain their mission to the store manager and receive provisions.

The housemates and the Consecrated also conducted leadership training programs for young girls in Virginia and Maryland. The program was designed to teach the girls how to live Christian lives of virtue through various lessons.

Promises and sacrifices

After her year-long service, Wigren decided to join the candidacy program. The program involves focused prayer and study in preparation for consecration.

Before she joined the program she returned home to say goodbye to her family. Consecrated women may not see their families for up to seven years due to the demands of time and travel.

"Christ promises whoever (made these sacrifices)

wouldn't lose out," she says. "I had to sacrifice my family. My sisters and my mom are my best friends and I said 'Lord, I don't think I can give my family up.' Then I said 'Carrie, listen to yourself, I love them more than God?'"

She says she also gave away everything she owned in order to demonstrate that material possessions were meant only to be used for utilitarian purposes.

"It was that whole poverty thing," Wigren says. "I only took what I needed, but it was harder than I thought to detach."

At the end of the candidacy, she would make a promise to serve God through obedience, chastity and poverty for two years. A year after making these initial

promises, she would reaffirm them and receive a wedding band signifying her marriage to Christ.

A choice to be made

In July of 2002 she attended a world youth conference in Toronto with other candidacy members. While walking among the many like-minded individuals, including candidacy members, she was struck by a familiar, but almost paralyzing feeling.

"The best way I can explain wanting to consecrate my life to Christ to other people is that I felt this restlessness, knowing I wasn't like the people surrounding me," she says slowly.

"The same thing hap-

pened to me there too."

Wigren spoke with her spiritual adviser, who recommended she pray and listen for God's leading.

"I told (my adviser) I didn't know what was wrong with me," she says. "I had this count down; I was excited, and scared. She told me to say 'yes' until God says 'no.' It is like when Abraham took his son up to the mountain and whether or not He accepts the sacrifice and tells you 'I wanted to see if you love Me.'"

Wigren went to the chapel to pray and ask God for direction.

"I told Him I didn't need to know what I was supposed to do exactly, I just needed to know if this wasn't specifically what he wanted me to do," she says. She



received her answer and came to the realization two weeks before consecration that she was not called to live a consecrated life.

Wigren moved from the floor of the dormitory where candidacy members lived to a floor above and began mentoring new members who came to the formation center to begin their year of service in the Coworker program. She then returned for three more months to the house in Washington D.C. to complete more apostolic work.

Life as usual

Today, Wigren sits in the living room of the two-story Bellingham home she shares with five other girls. Inside, the faint smell of an extinguished candle pervades the room. Pictures of Jesus and Mary grace the walls and a collection of angel figurines rests on the mantle. Six key chains with crosses dangle in a row from pegs near the door, and potted plants and flowers sit among the furniture.

"You could only get away with this type of thing with all Catholic girls living in the house," she says as she points to the pictures.

Wigren says she finds it strange that only a year ago she was close to making her promises, but she also says she is content and has gotten to know herself better.

She says she understands more clearly now what God has planned for her. For example, she still maintains a fairly strict schedule, but now includes marriage as a possibility.

"When I first got back, I wanted to live the life as I had," Wigren says. "I realized I couldn't do that – I don't have time for three-hour prayers. I felt like I was not being faithful and my spiritual director told me I was not consecrated and I should go easy on myself. I had to find that balance."

Wigren says in the Regnum Christi movement approximately 50 percent of the young women who join leave before consecration.

Sue Wilfong, Wigren's mother, was thrilled when she heard she was returning home.

"It was unnerving (before she left)," Wilfong says. "When

I kissed her good-bye I didn't know when I would see her again. I never heard of (Regnum Christi) and didn't have the details. I wanted to know who runs this thing, who do

you answer to – I had all these fears and she went off with faith in hand."

Wilfong says she supported Wigren's choice to live a religious life, but prayed earnestly that she would return.

Wigren currently balances her time between completing

homework, working and spending time at the Shalom Center. She also enjoys going on adventures, including her newest interest - snowshoeing.

"I love doing anything outside," Wigren says. "But I also love to be at home, in my sweats, drinking tea, reading and relaxing."

Wigren says she has time now to reflect on what she experienced during her service.

"I learned so much during my service, and I am still learning from it," she says. "It is amazing how much you can get out of one year of your life. God will not be

outdone in generosity – He always gives you more than you thought possible"

The experience has changed her perspective on life and the plans she had set for herself.

"I learned to find Christ in everything," she says. "I realized how much I didn't know, and how much I need to learn – Christ taught me how to love. It's an adventure, and I look forward to it every day, bit by bit, and when I find out what it is, it is going to be exciting." ❧

"I didn't know what to expect, but I was going to give God the first shot at my life. I thought that if God wanted me to dedicate my life, I was willing to do that."

— *Carrie Wigren*



BioDiesel or Bust



Would you like fries and a full tank with that? **Jordan Lindstrom** investigates the environmentally friendly efforts of two local Bellingham men selling biodiesel. Photos by **Tara Nelson**.

Driving alone on a long, desolate Eastern Washington road, Orion Polinsky glanced at his fuel gauge and quietly scolded himself for not topping off at the last town. His diesel powered Volkswagen Rabbit was almost out of gas, he wasn't sure how far it was to the next town and he was expected to give a presentation at a grade school later that day.

Twenty minutes later, just as the last remnant of fuel fumes had dissipated and a long day of hitchhiking seemed inevitable, he came upon a small town and managed to coast his now-empty car to a gas pump.

But when Polinsky checked the pump, he realized the one pump at the one gas station in the only town for 30 miles didn't carry diesel. Instead of panicking, Polinsky walked inside the station mini-mart and casually purchased a liter of Crisco vegetable oil. He then proceeded to his car, pulled a blender from his trunk and combined the oil with a few common chemicals he was transporting. Fifteen minutes later, when the mixture was ready, he poured the contents of the blender into the gas tank, started his car and went on his way.

Polinsky, 23, with his long black hair pulled back in a pony-tail and his well-worn running shoes on the verge of decomposition – must have seemed another west coast hippie suffering from heat exhaustion after a long week at a barter fair. But his mixture, aptly labeled “biodiesel” for its organic origins, is not only a viable fuel for diesel engines, but also is much cleaner burning and much easier on engines than regular diesel fuel.

Now, one year later, the Western graduate student and his long-time friend Devin Darst have decided to use their knowledge of the fuel to create a biodiesel powered charter bus. They recently created Biovoyager, a multi-colored school bus that takes eco-conscious adventurers on chartered trips to such places as natural hot springs, festivals, wilderness areas and concerts. Polinsky is also in the process of founding NorthWest Biofuels, a biodiesel production company.

“We both had a need to express our adventurous spirit,” Polinsky explains. “We wanted to find a way to make money traveling as opposed to spending money traveling. Because we’re both environmentalists at heart, it was either going to be equipped to promote solar power or biodiesel.”

When Dr. Rudolph Diesel designed the diesel engine in 1895, he originally intended it to run on a slightly altered form of vegetable oil, and even debuted an engine running on peanut oil at the 1900 World Exhibition in Paris. Eventually regular diesel became the fuel of choice as biodiesel production costs drove up prices and petroleum companies refused to sell the more expensive biodiesel at their stations.

Things are beginning to change, however, as the availability of biodiesel ingredients is increasing.

“Growing crops for production requires a great deal of space,” Darst says. “With burger joints and fast food on every corner, for the first time ever it’s feasible to economically produce biodiesel.”

Darst says that at some point he believes people will be able to drive to their local Burger King and pick up dinner and grease for biodiesel production all in the same trip. Old or excess cooking oil and grease are easily converted into biodiesel.

"There's a whole infrastructure already set up," Darst says. "We thought we had a limitless supply (of petroleum fuel). Now people are just starting to realize that at some point we're going to run out."

The prophetic Dr. Diesel stated in 1912, "The use of vegetable oils for engine fuels may seem insignificant today. But such oils may become in the course of time as important as petroleum and the coal tar products of the present time."

Biodiesel is created using only three main ingredients.

An oil, either vegetable based or animal fat, an alcohol, either methanol or ethanol, and a catalyst such sodium hydroxide are all combined in a few simple steps and create an environmentally friendly, clean burning fuel that can be used in vehicles

without serious modification to their diesel engines.

The Web site also states that biodiesel extends engine life because of its a powerful solvent. It breaks down buildup in fuel lines and engine compartments when used as either the main fuel or an additive.

Polinsky and Darst say that based on biodiesel's growing reputation as a clean burning alternative fuel produced from domestic renewable resources, they believe it will be easy to market and Biovoyager will catch on as a popular party bus for local environmentalists.

"Initially most of our trips have been made with friends," Polinsky says. "But the goal is to start chartering it out and get a party going."

Darst says it's just a matter of spreading the word.

"You'd be surprised at how few people know about a fuel that's been around for a long time," Darst says. "Many people are amazed by the potential of (biodiesel) when they hear what it is."

The Biovoyager bus wasn't originally part of the plan, but when an old diesel school bus became available a couple of years ago, they saw both a business opportunity for a charter bus and an extremely visible marketing tool for biodiesel.

With an ample supply of biodiesel, the red, green and yellow painted bus freely motors across the Pacific Northwest spreading its environmental message.

"I've never had a problem with the biodiesel system in the bus," Polinsky says. "One time the clutch went out, but that's just because I was getting used to it and was driving it too hard."

In fact, the only drawback to the biodiesel fuel Polinsky or Darst have noticed is its unusual smell.

"(Biovoyager) doesn't smell bad like it would behind a diesel truck," Darst says. "But it does smell like we just came from a country fair. Some people say its smells like buttered popcorn or corn on the cob."

But for now, the business has yet to take off. They are still perfecting the purifying aspect of the biodiesel production process, and the Biovoyager bus spends most of its time parked idly outside their place of business: Polinsky's home just south of Western.

"At this point (biodiesel) is easy to sell to people with a tractor on a farm because they don't have to travel long distances or worry about reaching the next biodiesel refueling facility," Darst says as a disappointed look appears on his face. "But companies that are profit motivated and people making long commutes are going to be slow catching on."

As Polinsky sees it, greedy oil corporations are trying

to delay progress, squeezing every last penny out of petroleum.

The two believe it's important to educate the public about the potential of the fuel and start garage-style biodiesel production facilities.

"One of the biggest obstacles (in spreading the word about biodiesel) is there isn't a large-scale setup for the fuel," Darst says. "You can't just go down to your local Wal-Mart and pick up a biodiesel processor – you have to produce it yourself. We hope to eventually have people making their own biodiesel at home."

While creating competition may seem like a poor business decision, Polinsky and Darst say they aren't interested in getting rich off biodiesel. Their objective is to make a comfortable income from Biovoyager while improving the natural environment.

"There is a whole market already out there," he says. "Between the trucking companies, mass transit systems and all the vehicles out there with diesel engines, there are a lot of potential consumers."

They currently have 10 to 15 customers awaiting batch-

es of biodiesel, including the Whatcom Transit Authority.

"We've taken biodiesel into consideration as an additive in our buses," WTA Fleet Maintenance Supervisor Kurt Karlson said. "The problem for us is supply. We need about 1000 gallons of fuel a day (to run the buses) and there just isn't the infrastructure right now to obtain it."

Recently, 12 school districts in the Denver area started using biodiesel as a way to reduce pollution.

If nothing else, Polinsky declares, biodiesel has a future as an additive to petroleum diesel fuel. As he describes in his book "The Biodiesel Handbook", a mixture containing even a 20 percent biodiesel blend substantially lowers harmful emissions and lengthens engine life.

"It's easy to blend with regular diesel," Darst explains. "There are some places where biodiesel sells for up to \$6 a gallon, so most people mix it as an additive."

Despite these signs of success, Polinsky and Darst admit they face significant hurdles in transforming Biovoyager and NorthWest Biofuels into successful businesses.

Because of federal standards regulating the quality of biodiesel to anyone selling to the public, they have spent months trying to perfect a process which includes settling, washing and purifying the fuel.

"Yeah, there are some federal standards for selling biodiesel," Darst jokes. "But basically you just have to make sure there aren't any food bits in the fuel."

Polinsky and Darst plan soon to begin marketing Biovoyager through magazines, newspapers and flyers.

They already have a Web site, biovoyager.com, where customers can check the charter bus schedule and place orders for biodiesel. Polinsky regularly visits schools across Washington giving biodiesel production demonstrations.

"We grew up together hiking and taking trips," Polinsky reminisces.

"We've talked about starting a company like this for years, and Biovoyager is the manifestation of that ambition." ♣

"With burger joints and fast food on every corner, for the first time ever it's feasible to economically produce biodiesel." Devin Darst



NORTH OF THE NORM



With unpredictable storms and gale winds, Washington may seem an unlikely destination for winter surfers. **Katie Grimes** takes a trip to Westport in late September to explore the passion behind the madness. Photos by **Katie Grimes**.

If the swell is big, the surfers will come...regardless of rainstorms, chilling temperatures and winds that regularly top 50 miles per hour.

Big winter weather means big winter waves, a devout surfer's playground. Surfing in stormy Washington may seem illogical, but a trip to the coast between the blustery months of September and February proves it possible.

Only a three-hour drive southwest from Bellingham, Western senior Scott Schneider and his girlfriend, junior Natalie Woods, pull into the formation of cars sweeping down a path on their way to the waves. Each vehicle, although different in make and model, shares a common feature: surfboards. Every car has at least one and some have more, piled high and strapped tightly to their rooftops. The boards crowd truck beds and jut out of trunks.

Schneider cranes his neck to the right, peering to the side of the surfboard hanging over his roof.

He pulls into a parking lot dusted with sand and filled with rusty, dented pickups, VW wagons and the occasional Audi.

Doors hang ajar on straining hinges, making room for their passengers to "suit up." This situation is a far cry from the trendy surfing stereotype of Long Beach, Calif. and Baywatch babes. It's late September. The sky looks like gray felt, the wind cuts like horizontal daggers, and tsunami evacuation routes line the roads. This is Westport, Wash., one of the Northwest's most popular surfing destinations.

The fishing town of Westport can be a lonely place on a weekday. It is hard to believe that the road to surfing bliss is lined by a sequence of docks and rundown taverns. During the fall and winter months the temperature on Northwest beaches hovers around 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Multiply the chill factor by 10 and add in winds topping 60 miles per hour and most surfers would explain the only solution to this equation is temperatures that are, "pretty fucking cold."

Schneider echoes this sentiment as he walks toward the beach past Westport's parking lot, hiking through a thick bed of sea grass. The reeds flex backward under their feet and the strong sea salt wind suggests that visitors turn back to the refuge of their warm cars parked below. But most charge ahead, anticipating the ocean. Climbing beyond the dunes, eager beach goers get a panoramic view of the landscape as the smell of sea life raids the senses. To the right, a long jetty of boulders extends out a quarter of a mile into the water. This natural boundary separates the two most heavily surfed areas of Westport, known to most as "the jetty" and "the groin." Schneider breathes deeply and takes in the scene.

He sets his board down in the sand and begins fiddling with his wet suit. He begins a systematic adjustment of the five-millimeter thick piece of black rubber covering his body from neck to ankles. Equivalent to the thickness of a mouse pad, this covering hugs the body tightly, leaving nothing to the imagination. Even when dry, wet suits have a tendency to bulge and collect below the knees, elbows and chest. Fixing this situation takes patience and humility. Schneider pulls up on a fold near his chest then stretches at his inner thigh until the suit runs down his body in a smooth line. He covers the remainder of his limbs with winter surfing necessities - a hood, booties and gloves - which he pulls tight only to let them suddenly snap back, like a surgeon getting ready to operate.

Woods tries to hide her laughter as her boyfriend struggles to pull the hood over his curly hair.

He shoots her a look, coupled with a knowing smile.

"I'm sorry, I know I look like a dork," he admits with a sigh. "I'm a wuss, this damn thing keeps me warm."

Schneider surfed for his first time in Costa Rica three years ago and has been surfing two or three times a month ever since.

"I got hooked on (surfing) in warmer climates," he said. "Once in California I was floating, waiting for waves, and out of nowhere a school of dolphins started jumping around me. It's experiences like that, being close to nature and out of your element, that motivate me."

Though Washington surfing does not include dolphins, Schneider said he still gets the same type of rush no matter where he surfs.

"A lot of people try to compare surfing to sports like snowboarding and it just doesn't work," said Schneider. "With snowboarding you get up the slope on a chair lift and skate down a man-made hill. With surfing you get yourself to the wave, and you are dealing with pure nature."

He nods his hooded head at the tumbling waves and leans over to retrieve his board.

"There is a lot less control. The ocean is very humbling."

"It's like trying to step onto a court of huge guys who are dunking when you have never played," said Losee with a shrug. "You should know better than to try to get in on their game."

From only a few miles east of the jetty and Losee's sandy observation point is The Surf Shop, the place where locals buy their boards, and beginners rent. Outside this beach-wood paneled shack, patrons lean on benches aggressively massaging their boards with wax. Head manager of The Surf Shop Barry Esty claims this Westport merchant is the first and only "real" surf shop in Washington.

With a gruff voice, he confidently explains, "Washington surfing is different for one reason, and that is reason is intensity, period."

Esty, 50, has been working on and off at the Surf Shop since it opened in 1985. Since then, he has seen the number of inexperienced surfers visiting Westport in the winter rise



The surfers offshore float silently in the water like bath toys in a giant tub. They appear behind one wave set only to disappear again behind the whitewash of another. Paddling out, Schneider struggles along with three or four others to dive under a collection of particularly difficult waves that continue to drag them toward the shore. It's as if the waves are playing with them, deciding when, if at all, they will allow these intruders the opportunity to ride their currents. Just when a surfer thinks he has made it out, a strategically placed wave pushes him back to the shallows.

On the beach, groups of hesitant surfers are scattered around the sand, watching this interaction and contemplating whether or not to join the game. Some just stand at the lip of the ocean, boards under arms, allowing the waves to lap at the toes of their booties, gently convincing them to move in.

From the top of a nearby dune, Western senior James Losee observes the wave-to-man interactions. His hands are shoved deep in the pockets of his sweatshirt and his back hunches slightly against the wind. Blond strands of hair whip across his forehead. He is on dry land now, but the crusted salt in his brows and in the crinkles of his face tells a story of a trip into the surf earlier that day.

Losee lives in Westport for three months out of the summer, living in an apartment above a convenience store.

"Being here during the weekdays, after all the weekend warriors go home, that was what made it great," he said. "By early week, most people are gone and you can just get away with yourself."

In fact, the lack of people surfing is the best part about riding in Washington, said Losee.

"There are few people in Washington who are willing to paddle out there and get into the lineup," he said.

This is because of the lack of experienced surfers found more commonly in towns like Long Beach and Santa Cruz, Calif. Demographic differences between the two regions are often the reason for this difference, said Losee.

"The grounds (or beginners) in places like California start surfing at age five as something fun to do," he said. "But if you are kid living in a Washington beach town that is not very well off, you are looking for a job, not a fun activity. This means the grounds don't start here until about age 16."

Losee said few of the local surfers are below the age of 21.

On busy weekends, confrontations between experienced locals and visiting surfers, (labeled localism) can be a problem. These misunderstandings are caused by inexperienced surfers who are unfamiliar with the unwritten rules of riding the waves. Losee compares this situation to a basketball game.

dramatically. He said this increase is not necessarily having a positive effect on the winter surfing scene.

"People think this is just a sport you can get up and go do like snowboarding, but it's not," he said. "This is the ocean. There are riptides and currents, especially in the winter. If you get out there without lessons or experience, pretty soon you'll be meeting the Coast Guard."

Winter surf means compounded weather elements, which means compounded danger, Esty said.

According to the Washington State Department of Ecology, Washington's coastal storm winds regularly topple chimneys, utility lines and trees.

"There are people here who have been surfing this stuff for 20 years, and they still don't have a clue about conditions," Esty said.

Schneider agrees with Esty, remembering times when even his best judgment failed him, causing a wipeout. These sorts of falls result in a trip through a spin cycle of whitewash and currents that can keep a surfer underwater for unsettling amounts of time.

"My respect for the sport and the ocean far outweigh my ability," Schneider said.

Wipeouts, though common on any surf trip, were numbered during Schneider's last 48 hours at Westport. Though he says Costa Rica and other hot spots will always be preferable surfing locations, Washington works for satisfying his surfing bug. One major difference between Washington surfing and surfing elsewhere remains.

"It's cold," he said laughing. "You have to really wanna do it."

At the end of the day, Schneider climbs out of the waves, tired but content. Peeling off the top layer of his wetsuit, he looks forward to nothing more than the dry sweatshirt thrown haphazardly over the driver's seat of his car.

He looks to his girlfriend for the keys to his car.

She looks at him with a guilty smile.

The two of them look down through the window of the locked car, only to see the keys sitting in plain view on the driver's seat.

It's Sunday night and Schneider and Woods stand arm in arm in the parking lot watching cars full of weekend warriors slink away and eyeing the horizon for signs of a tow truck.

The sky threatens to rain.

"It is always an adventure," said Schneider, trying to hide the discomfort of his rapidly drying wetsuit. "You can never predict what might happen." ❖



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